Chavez loses a friend in Gaddafi

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leader, telling him, "Will or die."

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Muammar al-Gaddafi, and Chavez, his friend to the end.

Mahmud Turkia

Former Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi, who was confirmed killed on Thursday, didn't have a lot of friends.

He was never really welcomed in the circle of Arab leaders, who considered him more of an African than one of them. When Gaddafi turned south, he found few supporters among African leaders.

All that makes Gaddafi's friendship with Hugo Chavez even more particular. Venezuela's president has been a staunch ally of Gaddafi from the beginning.

Chavez has been battling cancer, flying to Cuba regularly for medical

ana after another round

nmediately to say about

his friend's death.

But as the rebellion in Libya began, Chavez was out front, condemning the uprising.

As other leaders slowly began to recognize the transitional government, Chavez made a point of declaring that he would not recognize the rebels. In March, Chavez offered to try to broker a truce between the two sides. The rebels turned him down.

When Tripoli fell, Chavez released yet another statement upbraiding the rebellion as "imperial madness." But there would be more.

As Gaddafi fled, Venezuela was floated as one place the ousted dictator might be welcomed. The only other country in Latin America who offered to welcome him was Nicaragua. President Daniel Ortega was also a friend, but not nearly so close as Chavez.

No one's really sure why Gaddafi and Chavez enjoyed such a close bond. They did have a lot in common, in particular their distate for the West, and their outrageous personalities. Both enjoyed a wealth of oil revenue. But there was something more as well.

In September, Chavez revealed on state television that Gaddafi had written to him, asking for moral support as his regime crumbled. Chavez said that he told him to fight on. "What we have to do is win or die," he said.

Gaddafi must have been glad to have such unwavering support, after struggling to win friends elsewhere for so long.

His movements for pan-Africanism, such as a United States of Africa (of which, of course, he would be the first president), were largely rejected. And awarding himself the title of King of Kings didn't win him a lot of fans, especially on a continent full of leaders who are autocrats themselves.

Instead, he bought their friendship. Gaddafi poured millions of petrodollars into sub-Saharan Africa, building mosques, hospitals and whatever else these impoverished countries needed. He named most of them after himself. He won the loyalty of poor citizens in other countries whose governments rarely did much of anything for them.

Still, African leaders for the most part kept their distance, given his isolation from the rest of the world. When the rebellion began, most stayed pretty quiet, unwilling to take a firm stance in support of a guy they never had liked so much in the first place.

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